

Marches Archaeology

Holy Trinity Church Meole Brace Shropshire

Report on an archaeological evaluation

December 2003

Marches Archaeology Series 313

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**Holy Trinity Church
Meole Brace
Shropshire**

A report on an archaeological evaluation

NGR: SJ 4861 1057

**Report by
Jane Kenney**

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Holy Trinity Church Meole Brace Shropshire

A report on an archaeological evaluation

Summary

Three trenches were dug to investigate the area of a proposed extension to Holy Trinity Church, Meole Brace. No significant archaeological features were found in two of the trenches. In the third trench the underground remains of a brick privy probably dating to the 19th century were discovered. The privy pre-dates the present church and was probably related to the former vicarage.

1 Introduction

It is proposed to erect an extension behind Holy Trinity Church, Meole Brace; the site being centred on NGR: SJ 4861 1057 (Figs. 1 and 2). An archaeological desk based assessment of the site was carried out by N Baker (Baker 2003). The Local Planning Authority's Archaeology Advisor recommended that an archaeological field evaluation be carried out and produced a "Brief for an archaeological field evaluation". N Baker, on behalf of the Parish of the Holy Trinity (the client) commissioned Marches Archaeology to provide the archaeological services detailed in the Brief.

The fieldwork was carried out between 18th and 21st November 2003, inclusive, and the report issued on 3rd December 2003.

2 Aims and objectives

The Brief states the archaeological project should comprise:

- excavation of three sample areas each 5m x 2m
- reporting of the results

An archaeological evaluation aims to "gain information about the archaeological resource within a given area or site (including presence or absence, character, extent, date, integrity, state of preservation and quality) in order to make an assessment of its merit in the appropriate context, leading to one or more of the following: the formulation of a strategy to ensure the recording, preservation or management of the resource; the formulation of a strategy to mitigate a threat to the archaeological resource; the formulation of a proposal for further archaeological investigation within a programme of research" (Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations).

The objectives of this evaluation, based on the above stated aim, are defined in the Brief.

3 Methodology

Documentary research

No further documentary research was required at this stage.

Fieldwork

Three trenches measuring 5m by 2m were excavated. They were located as defined in the Brief, with the exception that the orientation of trench 3 was changed to avoid the tarmac path (Fig. 3). In order to comply with the recording system being used the identifiers of the trenches were changed from A, B, C to 1, 2, 3 respectively. The upper deposits were excavated by a JCB mechanical excavator to a level determined to comprise deposits, features or horizons of archaeological significance. Further excavation was by hand. The mechanical excavator was used in trench 1 to test the natural subsoil by digging a small test pit at the north-eastern end. A limited amount of hand excavation was carried out in trench 3 to obtain artefactual evidence and investigate the brick structure in this trench. All artefactual material recovered from hand excavation was retained.

The recording system included written, drawn and photographic data. Context numbers were allocated and context record sheets completed. A plan of the features in trench 3 was drawn at a scale of 1:20, one long section was drawn of each trench at 1:10 or 1:20 and an elevation of structure 304 was drawn at 1:20. The trenches were surveyed using a total station theodolite to enable their location to be tied into a survey provided by the architects. The photographic record was made using black and white negative and colour transparency film. No deposits considered to have environmental, technological or scientific dating potential were discovered so no samples were taken.

Office work

On completion of fieldwork a site archive was prepared. The written, drawn and photographic data was catalogued and cross-referenced and a summary produced. All artefacts found from stratified contexts were archived.

4 Site description

Meole Brace is a village to the south of Shrewsbury, the old core of which is now surrounded by modern housing estates. The church lies on the southern edge of the old village at a height of c. 66.50m OD. The underlying geology is of Carboniferous red mudstone and sandstones (British Geological Survey 1990). The solid geology is overlain by alluvial deposits of the 3rd river terrace created by Rea Brook (British Geological Survey 1959).

The proposed extension is to be added to the north-western side of the church, extending across the churchyard boundary into the Glebe Field (Fig. 2). The field is currently under pasture and there is no surface evidence of it having been ploughed in the past. The churchyard in this area contains no burials, and has been landscaped to produce a level terrace along the back of the church. There is a drop of up to 0.8m between the level of the churchyard and the field. The scarp between the two is crudely revetted with rough stone blocks and is topped by a hedge. Immediately behind the church is a broad tarmac path. The rest of the churchyard in this area is either under lawns or bushes and trees.

5 Archaeological and historical background

The desk-based assessment identified the possibility of a Saxon royal estate in this area, and the original church on the site may have been a Saxon minster church (Baker 2003). The medieval church was replaced in 1799 by a brick-built church, which was in turn replaced in 1867-9 by the present church. The medieval and late 18th century churches were to the south-east of the present church, so no remains from these or their cemeteries were expected in the development area. The manor house of Meole Brace, fortified at least from the late 13th century was located to the east of the churchyard.

The present church stands on the site of the former vicarage. The vicarage was recorded as having burnt down and rebuilt in 1669, so its origins were before this time, however, a photograph published in 1958 shows that it had been extensively altered in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Baker 2003).

6 The evaluation

The topsoil was a dark to mid brown silty loam up to 0.5m deep, and included lenses of bonfire ash in trench 2. The natural subsoil was a pale yellow-brown clayey silt, with mottles of stronger and paler browns and greys due to the localised mobility of iron compounds. It was very compact, largely due to its dry condition and contained occasional small rounded pebbles. In trenches 1 and 2 there was considerable root disturbance extending into the subsoil. The top of the natural subsoil was located at *c.* 65.00m OD in trench 1, *c.* 65.15m OD in trench 2 and *c.* 65.20m OD in trench 3.

Between the topsoil and subsoil in trenches 1 and 2 was an old cultivation deposit (Figs. 4 and 5). In trench 1 this was a mid yellow-brown clayey silt [101] with very few pebbles and no other inclusions. This reached 0.35m in depth and originated from the continual use of the field for pasture. No evidence of ploughing was detected.

In trench 2 there was a deposit of mid brown grey silts [201] with gravel and occasional bricks and animal bones. This was up to 0.6m thick and contained 19th century pot throughout its depth. A dump of bricks was noted 0.15m above base of layer in the southern corner of the trench. The lowest 0.15m of this deposit was lighter in colour and contained no brick fragments. It appears that this lowest deposits represented a former soil layer buried by the dumping of imported topsoil and rubble to raise the ground level. The area along the north-western boundary of the churchyard is level and at a higher level than the field on the other side of the boundary. Deposit [201] seems to have been part of the landscaping activity that created this level terrace.

Trench 3

The sequence in trench 3 was very much more complicated. There is no evidence of a cultivation soil in this trench and it appears that this was removed, stripping the area down to the natural silts in preparation to building a brick structure. This structure [304] was built in a foundation trench [306] dug *c.* 0.65m into the natural (Fig. 6). This trench cut a small oval feature [308] that contained early 19th century pot sherds. The cut may be the base of a posthole related to the construction of [304]. In the foundation trench was built a nearly square brick structure [304] measuring 1.50m x 1.14m internally, which survived to a depth

of 1.4m. This structure was built of red bricks. Those forming the upper few courses measured 230mm x 110mm x 80mm, typical of 19th century bricks, but the majority were much thinner, measuring 245mm x 115mm x 50mm, although they were somewhat variable with some being 60mm thick (Fig. 8). All the bricks were handmade without frogging, and many of the thin bricks were rather battered and eroded suggesting reuse. The mortar throughout was yellowish and friable.

The floor of the structure was flat and covered with mortar or coarse plaster. In the south-western wall was a gap 0.33m wide and over 0.34m high. The gap was located one brick course above floor level, and led nowhere as it opened straight onto the natural silt cut by the foundation trench. The outside of the north-western corner was inspected and proved to be very roughly constructed. No attempt had been made to finish it neatly as lumps of mortar had been left and bricks jutted beyond the line of the wall. It was clear that this face was never intended to be visible, even for a short while, and it seems probable that the deposits around [304] had been deposited as it was being built to bury the structure. The made-up ground deposits were composed of a layer of brick rubble in dark grey loam [320] covered by a layer containing orange sand and mortar [319]. Above this was a general soily deposit up to 0.35m thick containing inclusions of brick, tile, charcoal and mortar fragments. Over this were three thin layers; [316] a greenish brown silty gravel, [315] a layer of mortar fragments and brick rubble, and [314] a layer of crushed red sandstone fragments.

In the north-west facing section of trench 3 a brick culvert with a circular cross section was seen (Fig. 7). This ran into structure [304] but it was not entirely clear whether it was an original part of the structure. [309] was composed of red handmade bricks measuring 245mm x 125mm x 60mm (although some were up to 75mm thick). The mortar was hard and slightly grey, very different to that used in [304], but this difference may be due to the mortar in the culvert needing to be waterproof. The relationships between [309] and the made-up ground deposits were unclear. [320] extended under the sides of [309], so [309] seems to have been constructed after [320] was deposited. The other layers seem to have been dumped against and over the culvert. It was initially thought that [309] may have been constructed in a trench cut through the made-up ground deposits, making it a later addition, but no consistent and convincing cut could be seen in the section.

Any superstructure above the buried part of [304] had been demolished, but a few bricks forming the start of a barrel vault survived to prove that the buried part had been roofed. The existence of a superstructure was suggested by the brick and mortar rubble [301] that filled [304], presumably resulting from the demolition of the superstructure. Before this had happened, however, it seems that the structure was abandoned, probably without a roof, for long enough for a rich, loose soil [310] 0.2m deep to have developed in the base of the structure.

The finds

(See appendix II for more detailed descriptions of the finds).

Pottery and the base of a glass bottle dating to the 18th and 19th centuries were recovered from the rubble fill [301] within the brick structure [304]. An early 19th century creamware sherd was recovered from the abandonment layer [310] in the base of the structure. Although earlier residual sherds were included this suggests a 19th century date for the demolition. An 18th century blackware sherd was found wedged under the brick culvert [309], presumably

introduced during its construction. However, the small feature [308] stratigraphically earlier than the brick structure [304] contained a sherd of early 19th century creamware as well as a 17th century tin glaze sherd and a rim sherd of an 18th to 19th century glass bowl. This suggests that the brick structure could not have been built prior to the early 19th century.

7 Discussion

Trench 1 indicates nothing but the use of the Glebe Field for pasture since probably the medieval period or earlier. Trench 2 represents the landscaping of the churchyard in this area, by building up the ground to create a terrace. Trench 3 provides a date for this landscaping as the ground level here was built-up to the terrace level as part of the construction of structure [304]. The red sandstone layer [314] was probably debris from the construction of the present sandstone church, and the fact that this covers [304] shows that the latter pre-dates the church. This is also suggested by the map evidence, which shows no structures behind the church. The layer of mortar and brick [315] probably originates from the demolition of the superstructure over [304], and top of [318] formed the ground surface when [304] was in use.

The construction of [304] and the landscaping of this area therefore pre-dates the present church and was probably related to the former vicarage. The tithe map (1843, see Baker 2003), which shows the vicarage also shows a small structure in exactly this location. This proves that [304] did have a superstructure and its location in relation to the vicarage suggests a privy. The physical remains of [304] are consistent with the cesspit below an earth closet type toilet. There was no evidence of an entrance to [304] showing that it was not a small cellar and its size and shape are consistent with a fairly large cesspit. The gap in the south-western wall may have been to allow fluids to drain away into the natural silts. The cesspit would have been capped with a barrel vault and the toilet seat rested above this in a small brick structure. The superstructure seems to have been built directly on the walls of the cesspit as no other foundations were detected. There were no typically cessy deposits in the base of [304] but if it had been left open for long enough root and worm activity may have reduced the deposits to the rich soil that was recorded [310].

Although the vicarage was built probably in the 16th century (Baker 2003) the privy does not seem to be contemporary with its earlier phases. The pottery from the small feature cut by the foundation trench was early 19th century in date so the privy itself can be no earlier than this. The unusual sized bricks used could be early but they must have been reused in this structure. It is possible that the bricks originated from the vicarage itself when alterations were done.

8 Conclusions

The evaluation has revealed aspects of the recent history of the site. It demonstrates that when a privy was built in the vicarage garden in the early 19th century the opportunity was taken to landscape the whole area to create a level terrace and separate it more distinctly from the Glebe Field beyond the boundary. The present church was then built on this convenient terrace.

The Glebe Field seem never to have been used for settlement or other, non-agricultural activities, and no trace of a Saxon settlement was detected in any of the trenches.

As far as can be detected in the evaluation trenches this area lacks any significant archaeological features or deposits. The privy, while of minor local interest, does not justify preservation or further recording.

9 Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Holy Trinity Church for permission to use their facilities. Discussions with Nigel Baker and James Wade were useful in the interpretation of the privy. Fieldwork by Sue Fielding and Jane Kenney.

10 References

Baker, N, 2003, *An archaeological assessment of a proposed extension to Holy Trinity Church, Meole Brace*, unpublished report

British Geological Survey, 1990, Mid Wales and Marches, sheet 52N 04W, solid edition.

British Geological Survey, 1959, Drift sheet 152, Shrewsbury, 1:50,000.

11 Archive

The site code is HTMB03A. The archive consists of:

- 19 context sheets
- 3 trench sheets
- 1 drawing index sheets
- 5 field drawings on 2 sheets
- 2 sheets of survey notes
- 1 sheet of site diary
- 5 finds sheets
- 3 photo record sheets
- 1 film of black and white photographic negatives
- 1 film of colour photographic transparencies

Finds (see appendix II), also 2 bricks retained from structure [304].

The archive is currently held by Marches Archaeology awaiting transfer to Rowley House Museum.

Appendix I

List of contexts

Context	Trench	Description	Interpretation
100	T1 (A)	Dark brown silty loam	Topsoil
101	T1 (A)	Mid yellow brown clayey silt with very few pebbles. Extensive root activity.	Old cultivation soil
102	T1 (A)	Light yellow and grey brown clayey silts. Very compact. Containing occasional small rounded pebbles.	Natural subsoil
200	T2 (B)	Very dark brown humic silty loam. Includes lenses of bonfire ash.	Topsoil
201	T2 (B)	Mid brown grey silts with gravel and occasional bricks and animal bones. 19 th century pot seen close to base of layer. Dump of bricks 0.15m above base of layer. Bottom 0.15m is lighter in colour and has no brick fragments and may represent earlier soil deposit.	Made-up ground. Dump of rubble and topsoil to create terrace.
202	T2 (B)	Pale yellow brown clayey silt. Very compact with occasional pebbles. Root disturbance.	Natural subsoil
300	T3 (C)	Mid grey brown silty loam.	Topsoil
301	T3 (C)	Building rubble including bricks mortar and tiles in brown loam.	Fill of 304
302	T3 (C)	Foul drain and trench	
303	T3 (C)	Gas pipe and trench	
304	T3 (C)	Square brick structure with remains of barrel vault and mortar floor.	Cesspit below a privy?
305	T3 (C)	Loose, mottled brown sandy silt.	Fill of 306
306	T3 (C)	Vertical sided cut	Foundation cut for 304
307	T3 (C)	Loose yellow brown sandy silt.	Fill of 308
308	T3 (C)	Small oval cut.	Base of posthole?
309	T3 (C)	Brick culvert, near circular in section.	Brick culvert or pipe
310	T3 (C)	Dark grey silty loam. Very soily as if well worked by roots and worms. Not cessy.	Lower fill of 304
311	T3 (C)	Tarmac path north-west of church	Modern path
312	T3 (C)	Dark red-brown silty sand with flecks of mortar and brick.	Fill of 313
313	T3 (C)	Steep sided cut. Only SW side seen in section. Not noted in plan.	Recent cut or disturbance
314	T3 (C)	Layer of crushed red sandstone.	Possibly building rubble from construction of the church
315	T3 (C)	Layer of mortar mixed with brick rubble.	Possibly rubble from demolition of superstructure over 304
316	T3 (C)	Greenish brown clayey silt with c.50% pebbles.	Layer
317	T3 (C)	Deleted	
318	T3 (C)	General soily deposit of brown sandy loam with brick, tile, charcoal and mortar fragments and stones.	Dumped garden soil and rubble to create terrace?
319	T3 (C)	Mixed layer with orange sand, black loam and mortar fragments.	Dumped layer
320	T3 (C)	Dark grey loam with c.50% building rubble and a dump of grey ash.	Dumped rubble layer

Context	Trench	Description	Interpretation
321	T3 (C)	Dark brown silt with pebbles, brick fragments and patches of red-brown sandy silt. All very loose.	Fill of 309
322	T3 (C)	Slightly gritty yellow brown silt. Mottled with stronger and paler browns.	Natural subsoil

Appendix II

List of finds and spot dates

By Richard Stone

Context	Category	Quantity	Description	Date
301	Pottery	2	Industrial slipware body sherds	1830-1850
301	Pottery	1	Blackware body sherd	18 th century
301	Glass vessel	1	Base of green wine bottle	18 th -19 th century
301	Animal bone	3	Rib fragments ?sheep	
307	Glass vessel		Rim of clear (slightly green) bowl	Late 18 th -19 th century
307	Pottery	1	Tin glazed ware body sherd	17 th century
307	Pottery	1	Creamware body sherd	Early 19 th century
309	Pottery	1	Blackware base sherd diameter 14cm	18 th century
310	Pottery	1	Creamware	Early 19 th century

Context	Spot date
301	1830-1850
307	early 19 th century
309	18 th century
310	early 19 th century



Fig. 1: Location of site

[illegible]

Fig. 2: Location of study area (outlined in bold)

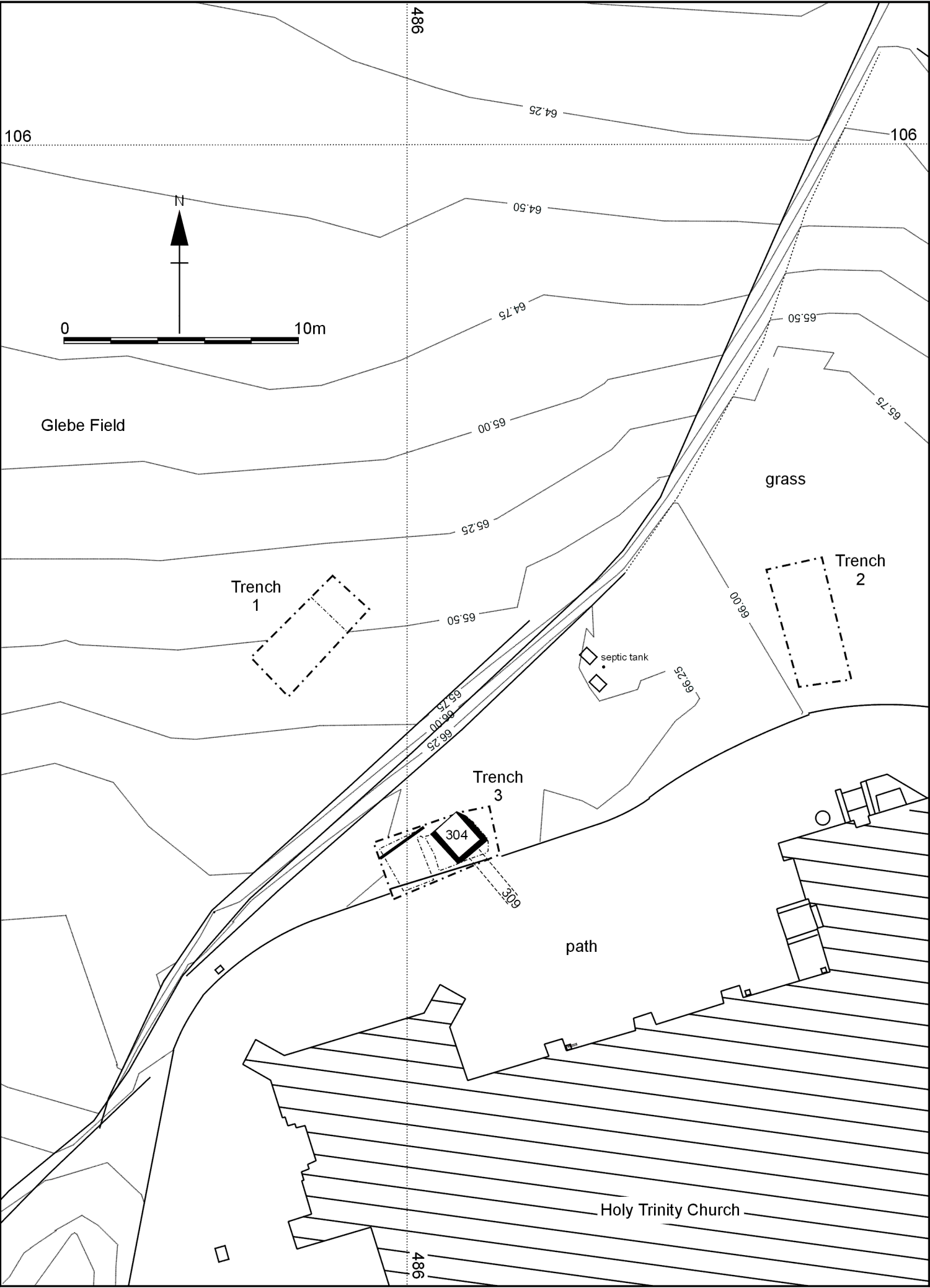


Fig. 3: Location of trenches

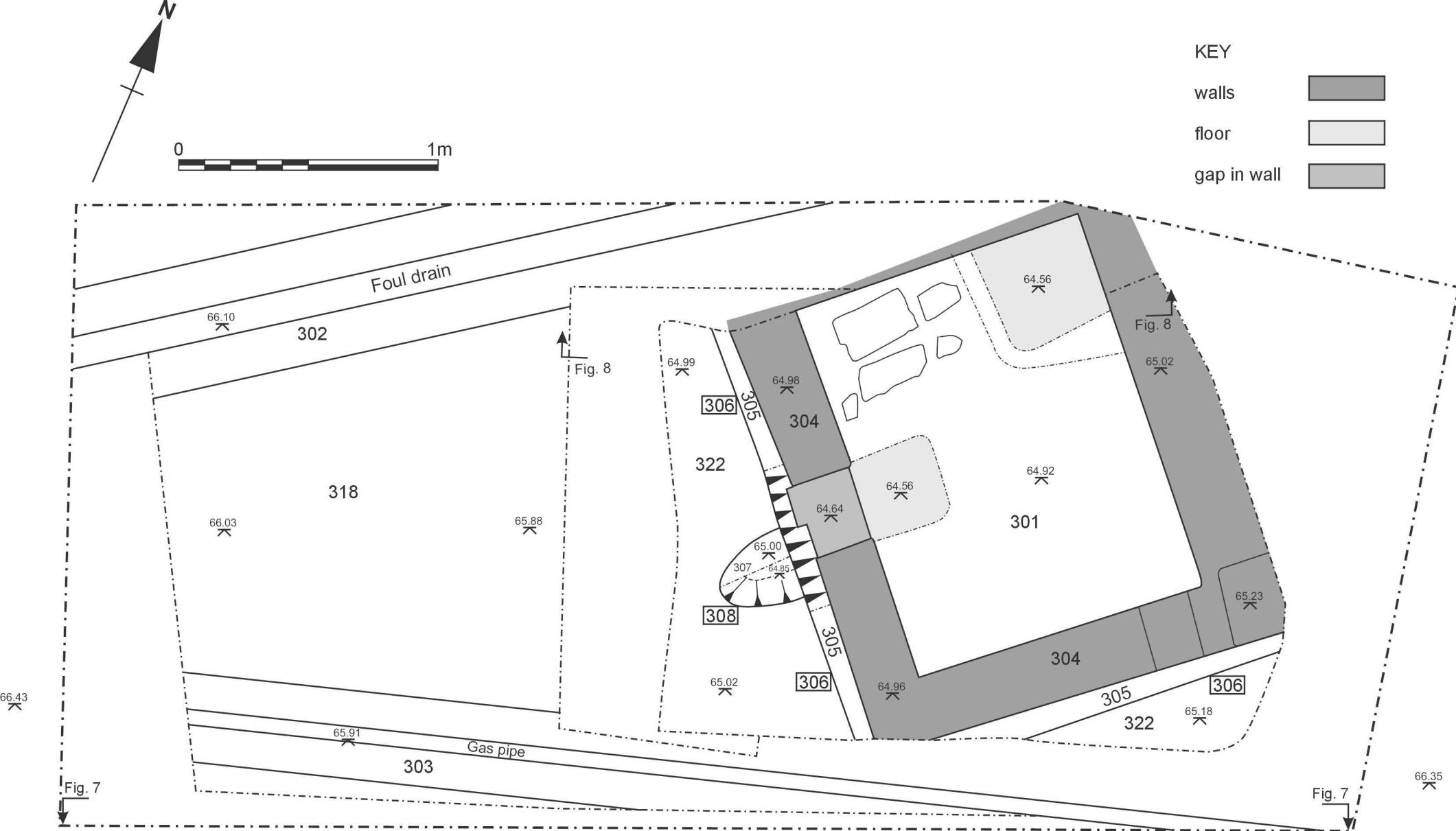
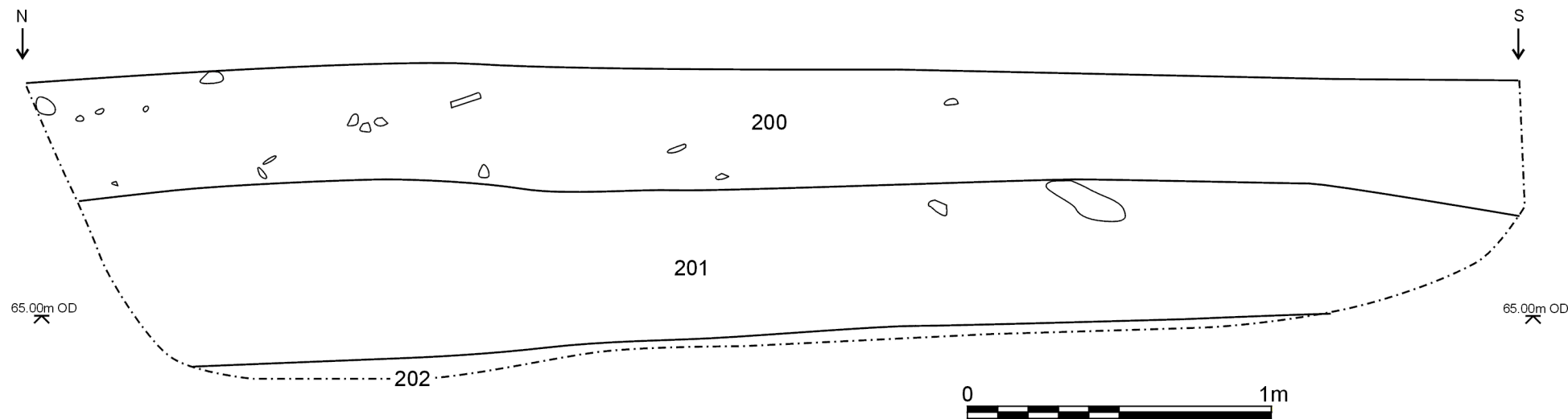
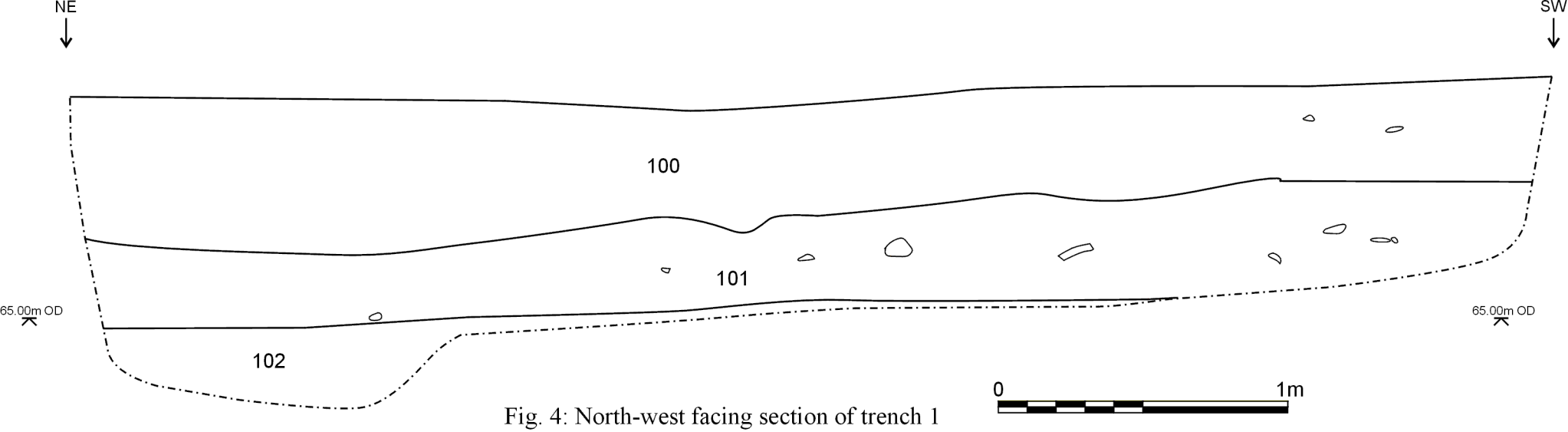


Fig. 6: Plan of trench 3



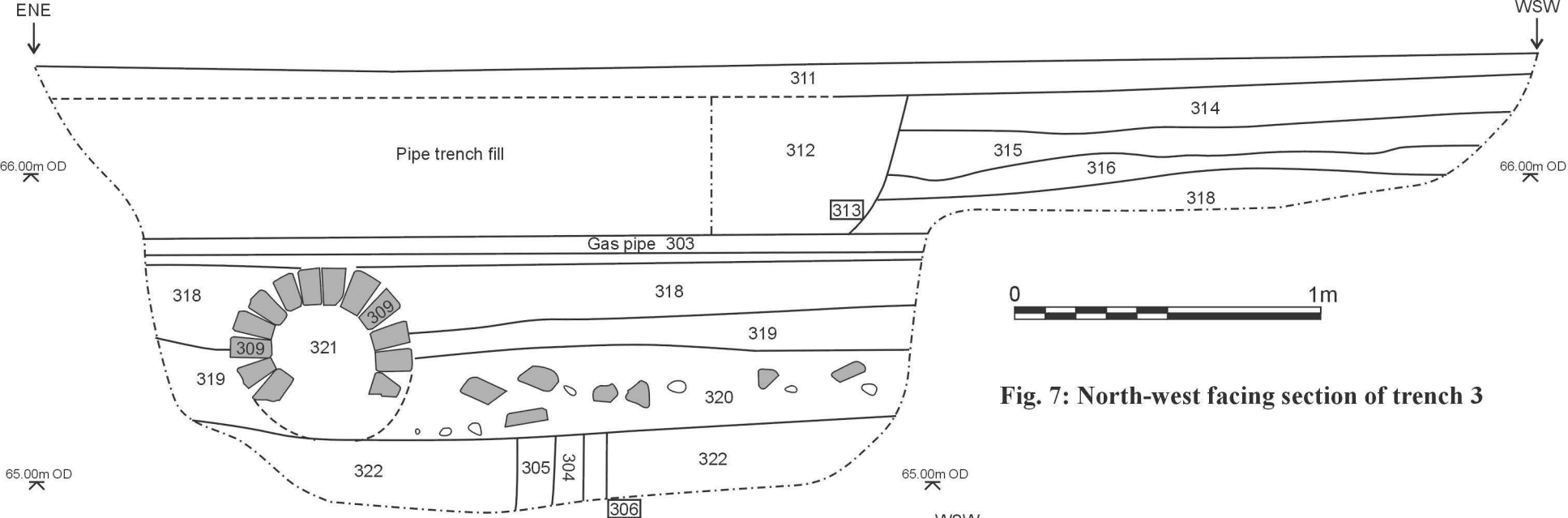


Fig. 7: North-west facing section of trench 3

KEY



Brick 
 Stone 

Fig. 8: South-east facing internal elevation of [304]

